

**REMARKS**

Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the present application in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

**I. Status of the Claims**

Claims 1, 3-6 and 9-22 are currently pending. Claims 2 and 7-8 were previously canceled. Applicants request cancellation of Claim 22. Applicants reserve the right to pursue the subject matter of canceled claims in subsequent applications. These amendments do not introduce any new matter into the application and their entry is respectfully requested.

**II. The Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. § 112, First Paragraph**

The Office Action, at pages 2-3, rejects claim 22 as allegedly failing to comply with the written description requirement. Solely in the interest of advancing prosecution, Applicants have canceled claim 22. Accordingly, the rejection is moot. Reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

**III. The Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)**

**A. The Rejection Over Alexander in Light of Brenna**

The Office Action rejects claims 1, 3, 6, 9, 14-19 and 21 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as allegedly unpatentable over Alexander (EP 0691079 A2; 1996) in light of Brenna (“Efficiency of Conversion of [alpha]-Linolenic Acid to Long Chain n-3 Fatty Acids in Man”, *Current Opinion in Clinical Nutrition and Metabolic Care*, 5(2):127-132, March 2002; abstract only).

**i. Office’s Arguments**

On pages 4-9 of the Official Action, the Office again takes the view that the claims are obvious in light of Alexander and Brenna. According to the Office, Brenna shows that the essential fatty acids of the composition disclosed in Alexander would have necessarily

produced 0.5% docosahexaenoic acid due to the fact that essential fatty acids, such as linolenic acid, are converted to eicosapentaen acid and/or docosahexaen acid when consumed.

Applicants have already provided a detailed explanation in prior responses that this kind of argument has no basis. Previous arguments have shown that the current claims administer compositions to a patient suffering from diabetes mellitus in a way not taught or rendered obvious by the prior art. The Office argues that because some of these compositions are converted after consumption, this should render the claims obvious. See paragraph bridging pages 4-5,

Brenna was cited at p. 8 of the previous Office Action to clearly show that the essential fatty acid components of the composition disclosed by Alexander et al. would have necessarily produced, e.g., 0.5% docosahexaenoic acid due to the fact that essentially fatty acids, such as linolenic acid, are converted to docosahexaenoic acid while consumed. See p.8 of the Office Action, Therefore, while Alexander et al. may not *expressly* disclose that the composition contains docosahexaenoic and/or eicosapentaenoic acid in the amounts instantly claimed, the citation to Brenna clearly establishes that such an element is necessarily present in the teachings of Alexander.

and bottom of page 6, explaining the conversion of linolenic acid to docosahexaenoic acid. As reiterated below, the prior art provides numerous ranges for the conversion of these acids, showing a wide variability of what might happen due to variable metabolic rates.

ii. Current Standard Regarding Inherency

When a reference is silent about the asserted inherent characteristic, the Examiner may use extrinsic evidence. However, such evidence must “make clear that the missing descriptive matter is necessarily present in the thing described in the reference, and that it would be so recognized by persons of ordinary skill.” *Continental Can Co. v. Monsanto Co.* 948 F.2d 1264, 1268 (Fed. Cir. 1991). Furthermore, “Inherency, however, may not be established by probabilities or possibilities. The mere fact that a certain thing may result from a given set of circumstances is not sufficient.” *Id.* (quoting *In re Oelirch*, 666 F.2d 278, 212 USPQ 323, 326 (CCPA 1981)).

iii. Method Claims

Applicants are not claiming the composition which may be formed in the body. In such a case, perhaps a rejection based on the possible conversion would be relevant. In this case, Applicants claim a method of administering a composition which is not taught by the prior art. Consider a case of a pro-drug administered to a patient which is converted to an active form. Here, the Office argues as if Applicants are claiming the active form, and the rejection indicates a known mechanism for conversion of the pro-drug to the active form in the body. However, Applicants are claiming a method of administering a composition, not the composition itself. Consequently, the current claims are not obvious over the prior art.

iv. Alexander and Brenna Do Not Inherently Teach the Current Methods

As noted above, Applicants believe there are further reasons why the objection of the Office is ungrounded, i.e. the calculations of the Office does not inherently lead to the values indicated in the Office Action.

First, the Office must consider what is actually disclosed in Alexander and view this disclosure in the context of any combination with Brenna. On page 4, lines 25 to 26, Alexander discloses that linolenic acid may serve as a precursor to other n-3 fatty acids which have anti-inflammatory activity. It is furthermore stated that preferably, at least 4% to 10%, by calories, essential fatty acids are provided by the composition. In other words, Alexander discloses that both essential fatty acids, i.e. linoleic acid and linolenic acid should be present in the composition in a concentration of at least 4% to 10%. On page 4, lines 27 and 28 Alexander suggests using a ratio of n-6:n-3 fatty acids (linoleic acid : linolenic acid) of approximately 4. Consequently, Alexander suggests a concentration of linolenic acid in the composition in the range of 0.8 to 2.0%. Even when applying the maximum conversion rate of 5% given in Brenna (actually Brenna suggests a conversion rate which is below 5% in humans) one would arrive at a concentration of EPA and/or DHA in the human body between 0.04 and 0.1% which is far below the concentrations given in claim 1.

Second, it is apparent from Barth (copy enclosed) that according to further studies carried out some years after the publication of Brenna that, in fact, the conversion rates are in the range of 0.3 to 7%; see page 328, middle column, ultimate paragraph of the English translation reading as follows:

Ronald Mensing from the Department of Human Biology of the University Maastricht and Joe Millward from the University of Surrey, UK, disclose newest data regarding the conversion speed from a-linolenic acid to eicosapentaic acid and docosahexaieic acid. They found conversion rates from 0.3 to 7% of the administered a-linolenic acid to eicosapentaic acid. The influence of the administration of linoleic acid, sex, age and nutritional status on the conversion rate has to be investigated.

Thus, when taking the lower values for the conversion rate given in Barth (See Appendix A) one arrives at EPA and DHA concentrations in the human body which are even lower. Applicants note that the results reported in Barth are in line with the results presented in Hussein (See Appendix B). In Table 2 on page 275 a conversion rate of 0.19% to 0.29% for EPO is given depending on the diet applied to the patients.

Third, it is apparent from all documents on file that the conversion rate depends on further fatty acids which are contained in the diet to be administered to the patient. Brenna already states that the conversion rate depends on the concentration of n-6 fatty acids and long chain poly-unsaturated fatty acids in the diet. Barth also suggests that the linoleic acid contained in the diet might have an influence on the conversion rate. Finally, it is apparent from Table 2 of Hussein that the conversion rate depends on the composition of the diets administered to the patient, i.e. "FXO" and "SO", respectively, varying as regards the linolenic acid (ALA) and linoleic acid (LA) content; see the abstract on page 269 of Hussein as well as page 273, left column, lines 1 to 3. In other words, the actual conversion rate is totally unpredictable depending on the concentration of further fatty acids in the dietary composition. Finally, it should be emphasized that no data on the fatty acid metabolism in particular groups of patients, for example patients suffering from diabetes mellitus, is known.

Fourth, the method of the present application overcomes the problems discussed above, i.e. the method does not rely on totally unpredictable conversion rates but provides a high and defined concentration of EPA and DHA.

v. The Cited References Fail to Teach Each and Every Element of the Claimed Invention

As noted in our earlier response Alexander discloses a composition comprising canola oil, olive oil, high-oleic safflower oil and soy oil, and teaches that long-chain triglycerides are supplied by these oils (*see* paragraph [0046] at page 4). Further, Alexander teaches that the composition may comprise 4 to 10% of  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid. Alexander fails to disclose or suggest at least two essential elements of the claimed invention: 1) a composition comprising *0.5 to 2% eicosapentaen acid and/or docosahexaen acid*, and 2) *0.5 to 2% eicosapentaen acid and/or docosahexaen acid from refined fish oil concentrate*. Brenna fails to remedy the deficiencies of Alexander described above, as the reference fails to disclose a composition comprising 0.5 to 2% eicosapentaen acid and/or docosahexaen acid, let alone a composition comprising 0.5 to 2% eicosapentaen acid and/or docosahexaen acid obtained from refined fish oil concentrate.

Thus, at least for the reasons stated above, the cited references either alone or in combination, fail to disclose or suggest the claimed invention.

vi. There is no Reason to Combine the Known Elements in the Fashion Claimed

Alexander merely teaches that the long-chain triglycerides can be provided as particular plant oils, and fails to teach or suggest a conversion product which might result in a mixture of fatty acids containing the particular amounts of DHA and EPA claimed in the present application. Even assuming, *arguendo*, that the metabolized products of the composition disclosed by the prior art are relevant, after considering all of the prior art, including Brenna, there is no certainty to one of skill in the art regarding the metabolized products resulting from the conversion of Alexander's composition.

For at least the reasons stated above, the rejection of claims 1, 3, 6, 9, 14-19 and 21 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) is improper. Reconsideration and withdrawal of this ground of rejection are therefore respectfully requested.

**B. The Rejection Over Alexander in Light of Brenna in View of Madigan, Heine and The Merck Index**

The Office also rejects claims 1, 3-6, 9-10 and 14-21 over Alexander in light of Brenna, in view of Madigan (“Dietary Unsaturated Fatty Acids in Type 2 Diabetes”, *Diabetes Care* 23:1472-1477; 2000), Heine (“Linoleic-Acid-Enriched Diet: Long-Term Effects on Serum Lipoprotein and Apolipoprotein Concentrations and Insulin Sensitivity in Noninsulin-Dependent Diabetic Patients”, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 49(3):448-456; 1989, Abstract Only) and the Merck Index (“Citric Acid”, Monograph 2328, 1989; page 363). Applicant respectfully traverses this ground of rejection.

The additional references, Madigan, Heine and the Merck Index, do not remedy the deficiencies of Alexander and Brenna demonstrated above, as none of these references clarifies the metabolic conversion of acids or discloses a composition comprising 0.5 to 2% eicosapentaen acid and/or docosahexaen acid, as claimed in the present application. Accordingly, the rejection is improper.

Reconsideration and withdrawal of this ground of rejection are therefore respectfully requested.

**C. The Rejection Over Alexander in Light of Brenna and Further in View of Bell and Mendy**

The Office also rejects claims 1, 3-6, 9, 11-19 and 21 over Alexander in light of Brenna, and further in view of Bell (WO 97/38593), and Mendy (US Patent No. 4,407,821). Applicant respectfully traverses this ground of rejection.

The additional references, Bell and Mendy, do not remedy the deficiencies of Alexander and Brenna demonstrated above, as none of these references clarifies the metabolic conversion of

acids or discloses a composition comprising 0.5 to 2% eicosapentaen acid and/or docosahexaen acid, as claimed in the present application. Accordingly, the rejection is improper.

Reconsideration and withdrawal of this ground of rejection are therefore respectfully requested.

### CONCLUSION

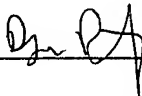
All of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed or rendered moot. Thus, the present application is now in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration of the application as amended is respectfully requested.

The Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone if it is felt that a telephone interview would advance the prosecution of the present application.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required regarding this application under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16-1.17, or credit any overpayment, to Deposit Account No. 19-0741. Should no proper payment be enclosed herewith, as by a check being in the wrong amount, unsigned, post-dated, otherwise improper or informal or even entirely missing or a credit card payment form being unsigned, providing incorrect information resulting in a rejected credit card transaction, or even entirely missing, the Commissioner is authorized to charge the unpaid amount to Deposit Account No. 19-0741. If any extensions of time are needed for timely acceptance of papers submitted herewith, Applicant hereby petitions for such extension under 37 C.F.R. § 1.136 and authorizes payment of any such extensions fees to Deposit Account No. 19-0741.

Respectfully submitted,

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By 

FOLEY & LARDNER LLP  
Customer Number: 22428  
Telephone: (202) 295-4620  
Facsimile: (202) 672-5399

Benjamin Berkowitz  
Attorney for Applicant  
Registration No. 59,349



**Tagungen und Kongresse**

# Rapsöl in der menschlichen Ernährung

## Bericht über das Symposium „Cardiovascular Health and Safety of Rapeseed Oil in Human Nutrition“ am 16.05.2006 in Berlin

Christian A. Barth, Institut für Ernährungswissenschaft der Universität Potsdam

Seit den ersten Berichten dänischer Forscher über eine niedrige Häufigkeit einiger chronisch-degenerativer Erkrankungen bei Grönland-Eskimos [1] sind fast 20 Jahre vergangen. Inzwischen ist es unbestreitbar, dass Fisch aus kalten Fanggründen wegen seines Gehalts an n-3-Fettsäuren das Wiederauftreten von Herzinfarkten und die Progredienz atherosklerotischer Läsionen verhüten kann [2]. Angesichts limitierter mariner Fischbestände und wegen der Kontamination bestimmter Fischarten mit Methyl-Quecksilber stellt sich die Frage, ob n-3-Fettsäuren aus pflanzlichen Quellen eine Option für die künftige Ernährung bieten.

Aus diesem Grunde wurde Mitte Mai in Berlin von UFOP und DGT (Union zur Förderung der Protein- und Ölpflanzen; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fettforschung) ein Symposium veranstaltet, auf dem führende Ernährungswissenschaftler, Kinderärzte und Kardiologen zur gesundheitlichen Wirkung von Rapsöl Stellung

nahmen. Denn das Rapsöl enthält – neben niedrigen bis moderaten Gehalten an gesättigten und n-6-Fettsäuren und einer hohen Konzentration an Ölsäure – als wertbestimmenden Inhaltsstoff beachtliche Mengen der  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure, der in Pflanzen am häufigsten vorkommenden n-3-Fettsäure.

Folgende Fragen sollten beantwortet werden:

- Was weiß man gegenwärtig über die kardioprotektiven Wirkungen der  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure?
- Wird die  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure durch den menschlichen Stoffwechsel hinreichend schnell in die langkettigen n-3-Fettsäuren, nämlich die Eikosapentaensäure und die Dokosaheptaensäure umgewandelt, so dass Fetten wie dem Rapsöl die gleiche präventive Potenz wie Fischfetten zugesprochen werden können?
- Wie stringent sind Daten, die auf eine risikoerhöhende Wirkung von

$\alpha$ -Linolensäure bei der Prostatakarzinomentstehung hindeuten?

- Welches sind die Lücken unseres Wissens, die durch Forschungsvorhaben vordringlich geschlossen werden sollten?

Das Symposium wollte nicht zuletzt Pflanzenzüchtern Orientierung geben, welche Ziele sie bei ihren Zuchtprogrammen bevorzugt beachten sollen.

Berthold KOLETZKO vom Dr. von Haunerschen Kinderspital der Universität München diskutierte die Bedeutung von n-3-Fettsäuren für Mutter und Kind vor und nach der Geburt. Der markante mehrfache Anstieg der Konzentration von Dokosaheptaensäure in Gehirn, Netzhaut und T-Zellen in der vorgeburtlichen Phase ist untrennbar mit der Reifung von Funktionen in diesen Geweben, wie Seh- und Hörleistung sowie von kognitiver und immunologischer Kompetenz, verknüpft. Dementsprechend empfehlen wissenschaftliche Gremien die Zufuhr dieser

## Tagungen und Kongresse

Fettsäure während der Schwangerschaft und der Stillzeit und in der Neugeborenenernährung [3].

Kliniker und Epidemiologen haben die Vermutung geäußert, dass n-3-Fettsäuren ihre kardioprotektive Wirkung über die Beeinflussung der Erregungsleitung im Myokard entfalten. Rainer SCHREPF berichtete über seine Untersuchungen an der Medizinischen Klinik Innenstadt der Universität München zur rhythmisierenden Wirkung von Infusionen mit Fischfetten bei Patienten mit einem Risiko für ventrikuläre Tachykardien. Obwohl seine Arbeitsgruppe eine Reduzierung des Risikos durch die Infusion bei der Mehrzahl der Patienten nachweisen konnte, schloss er aus den Untersuchungen anderer Kliniker, dass die Datenlage alles andere als einheitlich ist und weitere Forschungsanstrengungen erforderlich sind.

Peter Zock vom Unilever Food & Health Research Institute in Vlaardingen diskutierte bisherige Untersuchungen zur Prävention der koronaren Herzkrankheit durch alpha-Linolensäure. Er schlussfolgerte, dass die überwiegende Mehrzahl der bisher durchgeführten epidemiologischen Untersuchungen – einschließlich einer Interventionsstudie – eine präventive Wirkung dokumentieren.

Über ein laufendes Forschungsvorhaben, bei dem die Wirkung von  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure auf die koronare Mortalität von 4 000 Holländern untersucht wird, berichtete Marianne GELEIJNSE von der Abteilung für Humanernährung der Universität Wageningen. Die endgültige Auswertung der Daten wird allerdings nicht vor 2009 möglich sein.

Michael LEITZMANN gab einen Überblick über epidemiologische Studien, die die Wirkung von  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure auf das Prostatakarzinomrisiko untersuchten. Er legte zunächst dar, dass die Studienlage nahe andere als einheitlich ist. Während 6 Studien keinen Zusammenhang herstellen konnten, wird durch 8 Untersuchungen ein Zusammenhang nahe gelegt. LEITZMANN machte deutlich, dass die Widerspruchlichkeit vor allem damit zusammenhängen könnte, dass die angewandte Methodik zur Erfassung des Verzehr von  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure mit Unsicherheiten behaftet ist. Dazu kommt, dass die zu Grunde gelegten Lebensmitteltabelle den Gehalt an  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure nur unzureichend wiedergeben. Er folgerte aus den Daten, dass weitere Untersuchungen notwendig sind, bevor endgültige Schlussfolgerungen möglich sind.

Ursel WAHRBURG vom Institut für Ernährungs- und Haushaltswissenschaft der Fachhochschule Münster berichtete über kontrollierten Ernährungsversuche, in denen sie die Wirkung von Rapsöl auf die Serumlipoproteine gesunder Probanden untersuchte. Trotz des erheblichen Gehaltes an mehrfach ungesättigten Fettsäuren löste dieses Fett keine erhöhte Oxidation der Low-Density-Lipoproteine aus. Die Spiegel der Serum-Lipoproteine reagierten in gleich günstiger Weise wie nach dem Verzehr von Oliven- oder Sonnenblumenöl.

Ronald MENSINK vom Department of Human Biology der Universität Maastricht und Joe MILLWARD von der University of Surrey, UK, teilten neueste Daten zur Umwandlungsgeschwindigkeit von  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure in Eikosapentaensäure und Dokosaheptaensäure mit. Sie fanden Umwandlungsraten von 0,3 bis 7 % der zugeführten  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure zu Eikosapentaensäure. Zu untersuchen bleibt, wie der Einfluss von Linolsäurezufuhr, Geschlecht, Alter und Ernährungszustand auf die Umwandlungsrate ist. MILLWARD schloss aus seinen Untersuchungen, dass in Übereinstimmung mit früheren Untersuchungen ungefähr zehnmal mehr  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure als Eikosapentaensäure zuge-

führt werden muss, um die gleichen Spiegel im Blut zu erreichen („Äquivalenz“ 10:1).

Als Quintessenz des Symposiums ergab sich, dass die Forschung sich in Zukunft auf folgende Punkte richten sollte:

- ☐ die weitere Untersuchung der Kettenverlängerung von alpha-Linolensäure,
- ☐ die Gewinnung biochemischer und molekularbiologischer Daten über die Wirkungen von  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure auf die Zellbiologie des Prostatagewebes,
- ☐ die Erfassung weiterer epidemiologischer Daten über die Wirkung von alpha-Linolensäure im Hinblick auf die Endpunkte Herzerkrankungen und die Gewebsdynamik von Prostatagewebe,
- ☐ kardiologische Untersuchungen zum Nachweis einer antiarrhythmischen Wirkung von  $\alpha$ -Linolensäure.

Vorderhand – so die einhellige Meinung während der Diskussion – gibt es keinen Anlass, die gültigen Empfehlungen zum Verzehr von Rapsöl [2, 4] zu ändern.

### Hinweis:

Die Kurzfassungen der Vorträge erscheinen in der *Aktuellen Ernährungsmedizin* [5].

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### Korrespondenzanschrift:

Prof. Dr. med. Christdan Barth  
Georg-Srebl.-Str. 8  
81479 München  
E-Mail: barth@mail.dife.de

## Long-chain conversion of [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]linoleic acid and $\alpha$ -linolenic acid in response to marked changes in their dietary intake in men

Nahed Hussein, Eric Ah-Sing, Paul Wilkinson, Clare Leach, Bruce A. Griffin, and D. Joe Millward<sup>1</sup>

Centre for Nutrition and Food Safety, School of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH, United Kingdom

**Abstract** We studied the long-chain conversion of [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ] $\alpha$ -linolenic acid (ALA) and linoleic acid (LA) and responses of erythrocyte phospholipid composition to variation in the dietary ratios of 18:3n-3 (ALA) and 18:2n-6 (LA) for 12 weeks in 38 moderately hyperlipidemic men. Diets were enriched with either flaxseed oil (FXO; 17 g/day ALA,  $n = 21$ ) or sunflower oil (SO; 17 g/day LA,  $n = 17$ ). The FXO diet induced increases in phospholipid ALA (>3-fold), 20:5n-3 [eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), >2-fold], and 22:5n-3 [docosapentaenoic acid (DPA), 50%] but no change in 22:6n-3 [docosahexanoic acid (DHA)], LA, or 20:4n-6 [arachidonic acid (AA)]. The increases in EPA and DPA but not DHA were similar to those in subjects given the SO diet enriched with 3 g of EPA plus DHA from fish oil ( $n = 19$ ). The SO diet induced a small increase in LA but no change in AA. Long-chain conversion of [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]ALA and [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]LA, calculated from peak plasma  $^{13}\text{C}$  concentrations after simple modeling for tracer dilution in subsets from the FXO ( $n = 6$ ) and SO ( $n = 5$ ) diets, was similar but low for the two tracers (i.e., AA, 0.2%; EPA, 0.3%; and DPA, 0.02%) and varied directly with precursor concentrations and inversely with concentrations of fatty acids of the alternative series. [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]DHA formation was very low (<0.01%) with no dietary influences.—Hussein, N., E. Ah-Sing, P. Wilkinson, C. Leach, B. A. Griffin, and D. J. Millward. Long-chain conversion of [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]linoleic acid and  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid in response to marked changes in their dietary intake in men. *J. Lipid Res.* 2005. 46: 269–280.

**Supplementary Key words** long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid • stable isotopes • flaxseed oil

The potential of dietary  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid (ALA) to exert the favorable effects on cardiovascular disease associated with its longer chain relatives in fish oil (1, 2) will depend to a large extent on the rate and efficiency of its long-chain conversion. An improved understanding of how diet can regulate this conversion may help to explain why

there is currently a lack of evidence to support a cardio-protective role for dietary ALA (3–9).

Experimental studies on the characteristics of the polyunsaturated fatty acid desaturase enzymes suggest that long-chain conversion of PUFA precursors is probably rate limited by the  $\Delta 6$ -desaturase (10–14), with competition between the  $n$ -3,  $n$ -6, and  $n$ -9 substrates for the enzyme and relative affinities varying as  $n$ -3 >  $n$ -6 >  $n$ -9. This suggests that in practice, the main influences on the elongation of ALA come from competition from linoleic acid (LA) and possibly *trans* fatty acids. Given that levels of the latter in human diets are decreasing markedly with the newer *trans*-free spreads and that LA intake continues to increase, the current issue of most practical importance is likely to be the dietary ratio of LA to ALA.

Supplementation studies have generally indicated ALA conversion to eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), as indicated by increased phospholipid EPA levels, with most (but not all) studies showing no influence on phospholipid docosahexanoic acid (DHA) levels. However, stable isotope studies of ALA long-chain conversion using either deuterium-labeled ALA in infants (15–17) or adults (18–23) or [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]ALA in infants (24) or adults (25–29) have all reported conversion to both EPA and DHA, although DHA synthesis is generally low. Although an increased intake of dietary ALA might be expected to upregulate ALA conversion, this has either not been found (27) or ALA conversion has been downregulated (29), a finding also observed in response to increased intake of DHA in some (20) but not all studies (23). Taken together, these findings suggest that ALA can be converted to EPA and therefore can increase phospholipid EPA levels, but the main

**Abbreviations:** AA, arachidonic acid; ALA,  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid; APE, atom percent excess; AUC, area under the curve; BMI, body mass index; DGLA, dihomogamma-linolenate; DHA, docosahexanoic acid; DPA, docosapentaenoic acid; EPA, eicosapentaenoic acid; FAME, fatty acid methyl ester; FXO, flaxseed oil; LA, linoleic acid; LCP, very long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid; SO, sunflower oil; SOF, fish oil supplementation.

<sup>1</sup> To whom correspondence should be addressed.

e-mail: d.millward@surrey.ac.uk

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dietary regulation of ALA conversion to EPA and especially DHA is by no means clear, possibly because the tracer kinetics of fatty acid long-chain formation *in vivo* represents a complex problem with variable approaches to the interpretations of the studies reported to date.

The present study was designed to examine the long-chain conversion of both ALA and LA in subjects for whom long-chain conversion of ALA may be of particular importance: middle-aged men with an atherogenic lipoprotein phenotype (30). We sought to evaluate the influence of a marked variation in the dietary ALA/LA ratios on their long-chain conversion in terms of a) their accumulation in phospholipids, with a comparison with preformed EPA and DHA from dietary fish oils, and b) the relative conversion rates of [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]ALA and [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]LA to their respective long-chain products. In the latter studies, we also took into account differential isotope dilution attributable to between-diet and between-series differences in ALA and LA pool sizes. The influence of these dietary changes on cardiovascular risk factors known to be responsive to fish oil supplements has been described elsewhere (31).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Subjects

Normal, healthy, free-living male volunteers aged between 35 and 60 years were recruited for the study, which was approved by the University of Surrey Ethics Committee. The main selection criterion was an atherogenic lipoprotein phenotype (i.e., a moderately increased plasma triacylglycerol ( $>1.5$  mmol/l), low HDL cholesterol ( $<1.1$  mmol/l), and the predominance of small, dense LDLs ( $>40\%$ ) (30). Subjects expressing an atherogenic lipoprotein phenotype were invited by letter to take part in the dietary intervention. Exclusion criteria were hypertension, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption ( $>30$  units/week), therapy known to affect lipid metabolism, and any biochemical evidence of abnormal liver, kidney, or endocrine function or abnormal hematology. In total, 57 subjects completed the study, with a mean baseline body mass index (BMI) of  $28.5$  kg/m $^2$ . The 12 subjects randomly selected for the isotope substudy at the end of the intervention had a similar mean BMI of  $29.4$  kg/m $^2$  and did not differ from the main group in terms of the main selection criteria (i.e., triacylglycerol mean value of  $1.7$  mmol/l, HDL cholesterol mean value of  $1.0$  mmol/l, and small, dense LDL mean value of  $45\%$ ).

### Diets and study design

The study was of a randomized, single-blind design that aimed to compare single-step diets, fed over 12 weeks in parallel, that differed markedly in their ALA and LA contents. The main study compared a high-ALA/low-LA flaxseed oil (FXO) diet with a low-ALA/high-LA sunflower oil (SO) diet. A third diet was included, low-ALA/high-LA enriched with fish oil (SOF), to serve as a positive control for the enrichment of phospholipids with EPA and DHA and for influences on cardiovascular risk factors (not discussed here; see ref. 31) with which the FXO diet could be compared. The stable isotope study was conducted on a subset of subjects on the FXO and SO diets during the last 2 weeks of the intervention to address the specific question of the impact of the dietary LA/ALA ratio on the long-chain conversion of ALA and LA. The diets involved substituting 45 g of the usual fat

intake with either FXO (56% ALA) and other high-ALA, low-LA oils and spreads (FXO diet) or SO (69% LA) and other high-LA, low-ALA spreads (SO diet). The FXO and SO were supplied to subjects in laminated foil sachets (17 g of oil per sachet), the oils having been packaged under nitrogen and stored at  $-40^\circ\text{C}$  before use. Further enrichments were achieved through the provision of cooking oils (rapeseed oil for the FXO diet, SO for the SO and SOF diets) and specially formulated spreads containing either high (FXO diet) or low (SO diet) amounts of rapeseed oil. The SOF diet group received six 1 g fish oil capsules (Pikasol; Pronova Biocare), of which 50% was EPA and DHA (i.e., 370 mg of EPA and 230 mg of DHA per capsule, 3 g of EPA+DHA per day). The target n-6:n-3 dietary ratios of  $<1$  (FXO diet) or  $>25$  (SO diet) were calculated to require an increased intake of ALA or LA of 18 g above background intake. The feasibility of achieving this level of intake had been previously established in a pilot study in normal volunteers using FXO as the principal dietary source of ALA (32). Periodic measurement of lipid peroxide levels showed the stored oils to be stable over the experimental period. To avoid the potentially adverse effects of direct heating, the oils were introduced into the diet by incorporation into cooked foods, including pasta sauces, salad dressings, and milkshakes. Subjects were also provided with cooking oils (i.e., rapeseed oil (8% ALA, low n-6:n-3 ratio, FXO diet); SO (SO and SOF diets)) and spreads, either rapeseed enriched for the FXO diet or a standard formulation (Moro; St. Ivel) for the SO and SOF diets. The foil sachets, cooking oils, and spreads were identified by the letters X, Y, and Z (FXO, SO, and SOF, respectively). The habitual diet of the subjects was assessed by 7 day food diaries (33). Before each dietary intervention, subjects received dietetic counselling on an individual basis. This consisted of giving advice to subjects in the FXO group to avoid foods containing high levels of n-6 PUFAs and for subjects in both the FXO and SO groups to abstain from consuming any source of long-chain n-3 PUFAs, chiefly oily fish. Subjects attended the Human Investigation Unit at the University of Surrey on three occasions, always after an overnight fast (12–14 h): at baseline (pre-diet) and after 6 and 12 weeks (post-diet). Height, total body weight, an estimate of percentage body fat, and blood pressure were measured at each visit. Blood samples were taken by venipuncture for the analysis of plasma lipids, lipoproteins, and hemostatic variables. Dietary compliance was assessed midway through the intervention (6 weeks) by 3 day food diaries and at the end of the intervention (12 weeks) by a 7 day food diary.

In view of the relatively large dietary load of PUFAs, vitamin E intake and status were monitored in terms of both  $\alpha$ - and  $\gamma$ -tocopherol levels in the oils and plasma by liquid chromatography time-of-flight mass spectrometry (34).

### Analyses

Erythrocyte membrane phospholipid fatty acid profiles were measured at baseline and at 6 and 12 weeks. Blood samples were collected into containers with EDTA and sodium citrate. Blood cells were separated by low-speed centrifugation at  $1,100$  g for 15 min at  $2^\circ\text{C}$  and washed three times with sodium chloride (0.9% NaCl), followed by centrifugation at  $3,100$  g for 15 min at  $2^\circ\text{C}$ . The washed cells were transferred to a glass tube with 250  $\mu\text{l}$  of butylated hydroxytoluene in propan-2-ol (0.1%) added as an antioxidant, mixed, and stored at  $-80^\circ\text{C}$  until analyzed.

Lipids were extracted from the erythrocyte membranes with a mixture of 6 ml of chloroform-methanol (2:1, v/v) containing 0.01% butylated hydroxytoluene as an antioxidant (35). Fatty acid methyl esters (FAMES) were prepared with 1 ml of sodium methoxide (0.5 M solution in methanol), incubated at  $60^\circ\text{C}$  for 15 min, acidified with 50  $\mu\text{l}$  of glacial acetic acid, and finally extracted twice with 3 ml of hexane (36).

The resulting FAMES were analyzed by gas chromatography using a Varian 3400 gas chromatograph with a PAC capillary column (30 m  $\times$  0.25 mm  $\times$  0.25  $\mu$ m film thickness; Supelco, Inc.) and a flame ionization detector (250°C), with helium as the carrier gas. Temperature was programmed at 4°C/min from 150°C to 220°C. The fatty acid peaks were identified against standard fatty acid mixtures of known composition run on the same column under identical conditions (Supelco 37 Component FAME Mix; Sigma Chemical Co.). Individual standards [docosapentaenoic acid (DPA, n-3), docosatetraenoic acid (DTA)] were also used because these were not included in the standard mixture. The injection volume was 2  $\mu$ l and the run time was 45 min. Results are expressed as percentages of the sum of all identified peaks.

#### Stable isotope studies

[U-<sup>13</sup>C]ALA and [U-<sup>13</sup>C]LA (free fatty acid, >98 atom%) were purchased from Martek Biosciences Corp. (Columbia, MD). This preparation contained 97.1% ALA and 98% LA, the remainder being short- and medium-chain fatty acids as indicated by GC analysis. Solvents were from Fisher Chemicals Ltd. (Loughborough, Leicestershire, UK). Fatty acid standards and all other reagents were obtained from Sigma (Poole, Dorset, UK). The high cost of the stable isotope limited the studies to a subset of subjects. Because the objective was to examine any marked difference in the dietary ratio of LA and ALA on very long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid (LCP) formation rates of the n-6 and n-3 precursors (LA and ALA), a subset of 12 subjects were randomly selected from the FXO diet (n = 6) and SO diet (n = 6) and studied during week 12 of the interventions; however, samples from 1 SO subject were lost, so the data presented here for the SO group is n = 5.

The subjects of the substudy were given a single oral dose of 400 mg of [U-<sup>13</sup>C]ALA and [U-<sup>13</sup>C]LA in a milkshake at breakfast after an overnight fast. The milkshake was similar to that described by Burdge, Jones, and Wootton (25), an emulsion made from double cream (22 g), casein (12 g), beer sugar (4.5 g), glucose (9 g), chocolate Nesquik (10 g), and the <sup>13</sup>C tracers (0.8 g) in water (160 g). This was followed by a standard test breakfast comprising whole milk (150 ml), orange juice (200 ml), white bread toast (72 g), margarine (14 g), marmalade (20 g), and cereal (50 g).

Blood samples (10 ml) were collected from a forearm vein by venipuncture at 1, 2, 3, 7, 10, and 14 days. Total lipids were prepared from plasma (1 ml) by extraction with 6 ml of chloroform-methanol (2:1, v/v) (34) containing butylated hydroxytoluene (50 mg/ml). Heptadecanoic acid (C17:0) was added as an internal recovery standard. Purified lipids were dissolved in toluene and converted to their corresponding FAMES by the addition of 2 ml of methanol containing 2% (v/v) H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> and incubation at 50°C for 18 h. The reaction mixture was neutralized with 2 ml of 0.25 M potassium bicarbonate (KHCO<sub>3</sub>) and 0.5 M potassium carbonate (K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>), and the FAMES were extracted with 2 ml of hexane (37). Samples were dried under nitrogen and redissolved in 200  $\mu$ l of hexane; 2  $\mu$ l aliquots of this solution were used for analysis of isotopic enrichment by gas chromatography-combustion-isotope ratio mass spectrometry via an HP6890 gas chromatograph (Hewlett-Packard, Wokingham, Berkshire, UK), with FAMES converted to CO<sub>2</sub> using a ThermoFinnigan gas chromatograph combustion III isotope ratio mass spectrometer interface and with <sup>13</sup>CO<sub>2</sub>/<sup>12</sup>CO<sub>2</sub> ratio determined by a ThermoFinnigan Delta Plus X stable isotope analyzer. At suitable time points, pulses of CO<sub>2</sub> with known isotopic ratios [calibrated against the international standard Pee Dee Belemnite limestone (38)] were introduced as reference standards ( $\delta$  = -32.84‰).

All samples from an individual were analyzed in one series to eliminate interassay variation in the results, with each sample run in duplicate. Concentrations of individual fatty acids were calculated from peak area compared with the internal standard.

Quantification of <sup>13</sup>C-labeled fatty acids involved comparing <sup>13</sup>C enrichment indicated by the 45:44 CO<sub>2</sub> signal isotope ratios with the fatty acid concentration assessed from integrating the signal of mass 44 CO<sub>2</sub> produced from the individual fatty acids and relating it to the signal resulting from the C-17:0 heptadecanoic acid methyl ester standard. This enables <sup>13</sup>C tracer concentration in each fatty acid to be expressed as micrograms of <sup>13</sup>C per milliliter of plasma, calculated by multiplying the concentration (micrograms) of the fatty acid by the <sup>13</sup>C increase over basal <sup>13</sup>C (at percent excess).

#### Stable isotope calculations

When <sup>13</sup>C incorporation into conversion products was very low, a limit of detectability for the enrichment for each fatty acid was calculated as 2 SD above the mean baseline value (all subjects) for each fatty acid. Values greater than this were considered to be enriched. The experimental design focused on the extent of tracer incorporation into LCPs, especially DHA, rather than the early changes in ALA or LA, using approximate measures of ALA or LA conversion. This is justified given the lack of access to actual tissue metabolite pools, which is required for multicompartmental modeling. We calculated two measures of the relative conversion rates on the two diets. The first was the absolute conversion as the fraction of the dose appearing in plasma rather than being oxidized or deposited in intracellular pools, as indicated by the maximum plasma <sup>13</sup>C concentration of each LCP. This is expressed as the percentage of the dose appearing in LCP in the plasma pool, assuming that plasma represents 4.5% of body weight. Second, we compared area under the curve (AUC) for the 14 day time course (AUC<sub>14d</sub>) of <sup>13</sup>C tracer in each LCP (micrograms of <sup>13</sup>C fatty acid per milliliter of plasma), as reported by others (18–20, 39).

#### Modeling considerations

Because the transfer of isotope from LA and ALA into LCPs reflects both the rate of conversion and enrichment (atom percent excess (APE)) of precursor, comparisons of LCP AUC values between the two diets and the two tracer series (n-3 and n-6) had to take into account differences in the relative tracer enrichments (APE) attributable to variations in tracer pool sizes. The problem is shown schematically in Fig. 1. Variation in ALA and LA pool size means that the observed relative rates of <sup>13</sup>C-labeled LCP formation between diets and between series will not reflect the true relative conversion rates unless both tracer doses and tracer pool sizes are the same. This effect will be most apparent for n-3 and n-6 comparisons, as shown in Fig. 1, but will also be a problem for within-series, between-diet comparisons when there are dietary effects on pool sizes, as in the present study. Furthermore, these considerations apply to each step in LCP formation. With adequate data, compartmental analysis can take into account both pool sizes and precursor-product tracer/tracer ratios. However, with the present limited data set, a simple algorithm was devised to adjust AUC values to take account of between-diet and between-series variations in tracer pool size and consequent variations in tracer/tracer ratios.

First, variation in the initial enrichments between diets and subsequent precursor-product variation was accounted for by normalizing each <sup>13</sup>C isotope concentration throughout the time course. This was done by dividing the value by the ratio of the AUC <sup>13</sup>C APE of the presumed precursor up to that time point measured in the subject by the mean value of the same measure obtained for all subjects on both diets. This reduced <sup>13</sup>C concen-

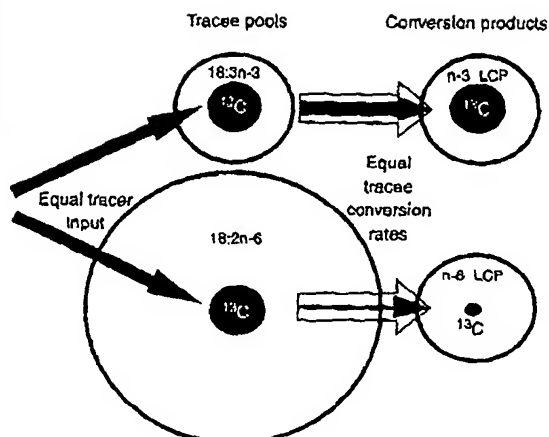


Fig. 1. Scheme showing the effect of tracer pool size on relative rates of tracer appearance in long-chain conversion products. With a 7-fold greater pool size of linoleic acid (LA) compared with  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid (ALA), the same tracer doses of [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]FA and [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]ALA result in a 7-fold difference in relative enrichment (atom percent excess) of LA and ALA pools. This means that with similar absolute very long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid (LCP) conversion rates, the n-3 LCPs will contain 7-fold more total  $^{13}\text{C}$  than the n-6 LCPs. Without taking this into account, LCP formation from ALA will appear much greater than that from LA. The algorithm described in the text adjusted the  $^{13}\text{C}$  content of each LCP to what would have been observed if the tracer/tracee ratio of the precursor had been the mean value of all subjects ( $n = 11$ ).

trations when the presumed precursor APE was higher than average and vice versa and resulted in more accurate relative, between-diet rates of LCP formation within each series. Second, the diet-adjusted n-6 series LCP conversion to DGLA and arachidonic acid (AA) was then normalized to comparable values observed for the n-3 series by increasing the AUC isotope concentration values according to the ratio of ALA-to-LA enrichments ( $^{13}\text{C}$  APE  $\text{AUC}_{14d}$ ), mean value, both diets. The result of these adjustments is that both between-diet and between-series variation in n-6 and n-3 LCP conversion will better reflect actual differences that would have been observed if the series precursor  $^{13}\text{C}$  APE had been the same for LA and ALA on each diet. The detailed calculations were as follows.

a) Between-diet comparisons. For LCP conversion in the series  $\text{FA}_1 \rightarrow \text{FA}_2 \rightarrow \text{FA}_3 \rightarrow \text{FA}_n$ , values for  $^{13}\text{C}$  concentration at time points  $t_0$ – $t_4$  were adjusted according to the following expressions:

$$\text{For } \text{FA}_2 \text{ to } \text{FA}_n \text{ at each time } = \quad (\text{Eq. 1})$$

$$\text{FA (diet adjusted)}^{13}\text{C}(\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}_{t-t_0}) =$$

$$\text{FA}_n(\text{mg}/\text{ml})_{t-t_0} \times \text{FA}_n^{13}\text{C APE}_{t-t_0} \times \frac{\text{mean}(n=11)\text{FA}_{n-1}\text{AUC}(t_0-t_1)^{13}\text{C APE}}{\text{FA}_{n-1}\text{AUC}(t_0-t_1)^{13}\text{C APE}} \times 10$$

These diet-adjusted values were then used to calculate the  $\text{AUC}_{14d}$  (diet-adjusted)  $^{13}\text{C}$  values for  $\text{FA}_2$  to  $\text{FA}_n$ .

b) Between-series comparisons.

For dihomo- $\gamma$ -linolenate (DGLA) and AA at each time =  $t$   
(Eq. 2)

$$\text{FA (diet and series-adjusted)}^{13}\text{C}(\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}_{t-t_0}) =$$

$$\frac{\text{FA (diet-adjusted)}^{13}\text{C}(\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}_{t-t_0}) \times \text{mean}(n=11)\text{ALA AUC}_{14d}^{13}\text{C APE}}{\text{mean}(n=11)\text{LA AUC}_{14d}^{13}\text{C APE}}$$

These diet- and series-adjusted values were then used to calculate the  $\text{AUC}_{14d}$  (diet-adjusted)  $^{13}\text{C}$  values for DGLA and AA.

Adjustment 1 resulted in values for  $^{13}\text{C}$  and consequent AUC values that would have occurred if the precursor enrichment up to that time point had been the same as the average value for that series. The factor 10 ensures values are as micrograms per milliliter.

Adjustment 2 resulted in AUC values for dihomo- $\gamma$ -linolenate (DGLA) and AA that would have been observed if the LA APE had been the same as that for ALA, enabling more accurate n-6 and n-3 comparisons. The  $\text{AUC}_{14d}$  APE value was used rather than the 24 h enrichment because this takes into account both the initial enrichment and the persistence of enrichment with time, which differed between LA and ALA because of the different pool sizes and relative turnover rates. The value for the ratio of  $\text{AUC}_{14d}^{13}\text{C APE}$  for ALA to LA used in equation 2 was 4.98, whereas the ratio of the  $^{13}\text{C APE}_{24h}$  values was 9.7.

#### Statistical methods and calculations

For the red cell fatty acid profiles, the statistical model was an analysis of the dietary influences on the changes from baseline at 6 and 12 weeks. The significance of any change from baseline was examined by paired  $t$ -tests. Where significant changes occurred, any dietary influences on the extent of the changes were examined by ANOVA with post hoc comparisons by the Tukey HSD test. Homogeneity of variances was tested by the Brown and Forsythe modification of Levene's test, and normality was examined by the Shapiro-Wilk test on the original or log-transformed data after trimming for outliers ( $>\pm 3$  SD). Where the ANOVA assumptions were violated, nonparametric tests were used (i.e., Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA by ranks with post hoc testing by Mann-Whitney  $U$  test).

For the  $^{13}\text{C}$  measurements, a two-tailed, unpaired  $t$ -test was used to test for significant differences between AUC values from subjects fed the SO and FXO diets. Overall conversion of tracer to AA, EPA, DPA, and DHA in the plasma pool was calculated from the maximum observed plasma  $^{13}\text{C}$  concentration (micrograms per milliliter) as a proportion of the dose, assuming that the plasma volume was 4.5% of body weight. This will be less than overall whole body tracer to the extent that  $^{13}\text{C}$ -labeled LCPs are incorporated into tissue lipid pools. Fractional conversion rates were calculated for  $\text{DGLA} \rightarrow \text{AA}$ ,  $\text{EPA} \rightarrow \text{DPA}$ , and  $\text{DPA} \rightarrow \text{DHA}$  from ratios of AUC values. Values for  $\text{LA} \rightarrow \text{DGLA}$  and  $\text{ALA} \rightarrow \text{EPA}$  were not calculated since the AUC values for ALA and LA were underestimates of the actual values because peak enrichment was likely to have occurred before the first sampling time at 24 h.

## RESULTS

#### Dietary compliance and intakes

The dietary oils were well tolerated, and the FXO and SO were successfully incorporated into foods, as we had shown to be feasible in a preliminary pilot study of the incorporation of FXO into various foods and meals (32). Dietary





compliance was excellent (Table 1), meeting the planned intakes of ALA (18.6 g/day in the FXO diet, 0.9 g/day in the SO and SOF diets compared with 0.8 g/day at baseline), LA (24.8 g/day in the SO diet, 8.4 g/day in the FXO and SOF diets compared with 5.8 g/day at baseline), and longer chain n-3 (2.2 g/day EPA and 1.4 g/day DHA in the SOF diet, 0.8 g/day EPA+DHA in the FA and SO diets compared with 0.7 g/day EPA+DHA at baseline). Thus, the three diets were accompanied by significant changes in the ratio of dietary n-6 to n-3 PUFAs, from 8.4 to 0.5 (FXO;  $P < 0.001$ ), 9.5 to 27.9 (SO;  $P < 0.05$ ), and 9.2 to 5.2 (SOF;  $P < 0.05$ ). Subjects recorded when they incorporated the sachets of additional oils (FXO, SO, and SOF) into foods and meals, and from this information compliance with the diets seemed satisfactory, indicating the anticipated increased dietary intake of dietary ALA. All three diets were associated with a small increase in energy derived from dietary fat at the expense of dietary carbohydrate, which was significant for the SO group (+14%;  $P < 0.01$ ). Nevertheless, there were no increases in mean body weight, percentage body fat, or BMI over the intervention period.

The dietary oils provided vitamin E mainly as  $\alpha$ -tocopherol in the FXO diet and  $\alpha$ -tocopherol in the SO diet, so that plasma levels of  $\alpha$ -tocopherols tended to be higher in the FXO subjects at 6 and 12 weeks. However, for the major vitamin E species,  $\alpha$ -tocopherol, there were no differences between subjects on the three diets at 6 or 12 weeks in concentration or in  $\alpha$ -tocopherol/cholesterol ratios (data not shown).

#### Fatty acid composition of erythrocytes

There were no significant differences in any fatty acid between the three diet groups at baseline. The ratios of n-6:n-3 and AA/EPA were  $4.2 \pm 2.5$  and  $12.0 \pm 8.6$ , respectively. Any influence of either ALA or LA levels in the background diets on very long-chain n-3 PUFAs was examined by correlation analysis. ALA concentrations were unrelated to those of its long-chain conversion products (EPA, DPA, or DHA), and LA was unrelated to AA or C22n-6, although it was positively correlated with GLA and DGLA. In fact, the main relationship was an inverse correlation between PUFAs (whether n-3 or n-6) and palmitic acid (PA), stearic acid (SA), and oleic acid (OA).

With few exceptions, the responses to the dietary inter-

ventions, shown in Fig. 2A, B as changes from baseline at 6 and 12 weeks, were effectively complete by 6 weeks. All three diets induced an exchange of palmitic acid and oleic acid for PUFAs, with no change in stearic acid, increasing the polyunsaturated/saturated (P/S) ratio on average from 1.17 to 1.42, with no differences between the diets.

With the SO diet, LA increased from  $14.1 \pm 3.1\%$  to  $16.0 \pm 2.3\%$  ( $P < 0.05$ ) at 12 weeks, with no changes in the n-6:n-3 or AA/EPA ratio.

With the SOF diet, all n-3 LCPs increased significantly, mainly in exchange for palmitic and oleic acids. Thus, EPA doubled and DPA and DHA increased by 50%, so that the n-6:n-3 ratio decreased from 3.6 to 2.2 ( $P < 0.02$ ) and the AA/EPA ratio declined from 8.4 to 3.2 ( $P < 0.01$ ).

With the FXO diet, ALA increased >3-fold (from  $0.36 \pm 0.3\%$  to  $1.33 \pm 0.8\%$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ), EPA increased >2-fold (from 1.47% to 3.85%;  $P < 0.001$ ), and DPA increased by 50% (from 2.72% to 3.44%;  $P = 0.02$ ), with no change in DHA. Because there were only small changes in LA (declining from 13.7 to 12.5;  $P = 0.1$ ) and no change in AA concentrations, the decrease in AA/EPA and n-6:n-3 ratios, from 13.9 to 5.5 and 4.3 to 3.0, respectively ( $P < 0.001$  in each case), reflected only the increase in the n-3 LCPs. Thus, EPA and DPA formation from ALA meant that the increases in these two fatty acids did not differ from those in the SOF group (Mann-Whitney *U*-tests:  $P = 0.24$  and  $P = 0.16$ , respectively) (Fig. 2B). The similar changes in EPA concentrations with the FXO and SOF diets after intakes of 18 g/day ALA and 3 g/day preformed EPA+DHA containing 1.7 g of EPA indicates a dietary equivalence of a maximum of 10:1.

ALA long-chain conversion is thought to reflect competition between n-6 and n-3 substrates, and although the relationship between the LA/ALA ratio and EPA concentration was weak within the FXO group ( $r^2 = 15\%$ ,  $P = 0.08$  for EPA at 12 weeks) and not evident in the SO group, the changes in membrane EPA from baseline did reflect ALA levels. Increases in EPA from baseline in the FXO group correlated with increases in ALA at 6 weeks ( $r^2 = 18\%$ ) and at 12 weeks ( $r^2 = 19\%$ ).

#### Stable isotope analysis

The fatty acid profile of erythrocytes (Fig. 3) of the subgroups was similar to that of the main cohort (i.e., lower

TABLE 1. Dietary composition: pre- and postintervention dietary intakes

Diet	Total Energy	Fat	Carbohydrate	Protein	n-3 PUFA	n-6 PUFA	n-6:n-3
	kcal/day	% energy	% energy		g/day (% energy)		ratio
FXO (n = 21)							
Pre-diet	2,413 $\pm$ 448	37 $\pm$ 7	42 $\pm$ 7	17 $\pm$ 3	1.2 $\pm$ 2.2* (0.6)	5.8 $\pm$ 5.4* (2.4)	8.4 $\pm$ 5.5*
Post-diet	2,603 $\pm$ 636	41 $\pm$ 6	39 $\pm$ 7	15 $\pm$ 3	19 $\pm$ 1.3 (6.9)	8.7 $\pm$ 3.1 (3.1)	0.5 $\pm$ 0.16
SO (n = 17)							
Pre-diet	2,391 $\pm$ 274	36 $\pm$ 6	43 $\pm$ 7	15 $\pm$ 2	0.8 $\pm$ 0.4* (0.3)	7.6 $\pm$ 6.3* (3.0)	9.5 $\pm$ 4.2*
Post-diet	2,426 $\pm$ 494	41 $\pm$ 6*	41 $\pm$ 7	15 $\pm$ 3	1.5 $\pm$ 0.8 (0.5)	25.2 $\pm$ 5.8 (9.3)	27.9 $\pm$ 29
SO + SOF (n = 19)							
Pre-diet	2,655 $\pm$ 480	37 $\pm$ 6	40 $\pm$ 6	16 $\pm$ 2	0.6 $\pm$ 0.4* (0.2)	5.7 $\pm$ 3.9* (1.9)	9.2 $\pm$ 4.9*
Post-diet	2,570 $\pm$ 574	41 $\pm$ 7.6	38 $\pm$ 7	14 $\pm$ 2	4.7 $\pm$ 0.9 (1.6)	24.0 $\pm$ 3.1 (8.4)	5.2 $\pm$ 0.81

FXO, flaxseed oil; SO, sunflower oil; SOF, fish oil supplementation. Values are means  $\pm$  SD.

\*  $P < 0.05$  (pre-diet versus post-diet).

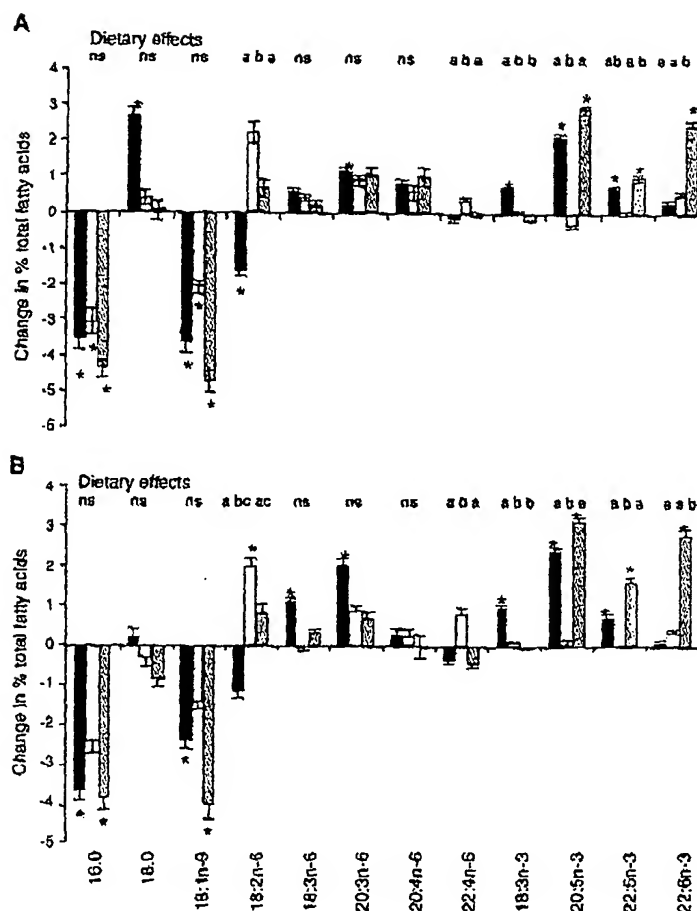


Fig. 2. Response of erythrocyte phospholipid fatty acid profiles to interventions. A: Six weeks. B: Twelve weeks. Black bars, flaxseed oil (FXO) diet ( $n = 21$ ); white bars, sunflower oil (SO) diet ( $n = 17$ ); gray bars, fish oil supplementation (SOF) diet ( $n = 19$ ). Values are means  $\pm$  SD. Asterisks indicate significant differences from baseline ( $P < 0.05$ ). Different letters indicate significant differences between diets ( $P < 0.05$ ).

levels of LA and significantly higher values for the n-3 fatty acids apart from DHA in the FXO diet compared with the SO diet). For the sampled plasma lipid pool (Fig. 3), the dietary influences were broadly similar, with significantly higher values for all n-3 fatty acids apart from DHA in the FXO diet compared with the SO diet and with lower n-6 levels (but not significantly so) in the FXO diet compared with the SO diet.

$^{13}\text{C}$  enrichment was observed in LCPs of both n-6 (DGLA and AA) and n-3 (EPA, DPA, and DHA) series. Differences in tracer pool sizes resulted in differential dilutions of tracer both between PUFA series and between diets within each series. Thus, there was a much lower initial  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichment (APE) of LA at 24 h after the dose compared with ALA (i.e., the ALA/LA APE<sub>24h</sub> ratio was  $9.7 \pm 4.50$  overall) and higher values in the n-6 ( $13.1 \pm 4.8$ ) compared with the FXO diet ( $7.4 \pm 2.7$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). However, the slower turnover of LA compared with ALA

(half-life = 2.2 and 1.1 days for LA and ALA, respectively), no doubt reflecting the much larger LA pool, meant that the differences in LA and ALA enrichment over the 14 day study was not as marked as at 24 h ( $^{13}\text{C}$  APE AUC<sub>14d</sub> ALA/LA ratio =  $5.0 \pm 3.1$ ;  $n = 11$ ). Fourteen day ALA/LA enrichment ratios were again higher in subjects fed the n-6 ( $8.2 \pm 2.4$ ) compared with the FXO diet ( $2.9 \pm 0.9$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ).

$^{13}\text{C}$  concentrations (micrograms per milliliter of plasma) at 24 h were similar for each tracer and each dietary group (ratio for both diets =  $0.89 \pm 0.31$ ), suggesting similar initial tracer partition between oxidation, tissue storage, and entry into the sampled plasma pool. As with enrichment, the slower turnover of LA meant that the AUC<sub>14d</sub>  $^{13}\text{C}$  concentration was higher for LA than for ALA (ALA/LA ratio = 0.45;  $n = 11$ ).

Overall conversion rates of LA and ALA, calculated from peak  $^{13}\text{C}$  LCP concentrations adjusted for dietary in-



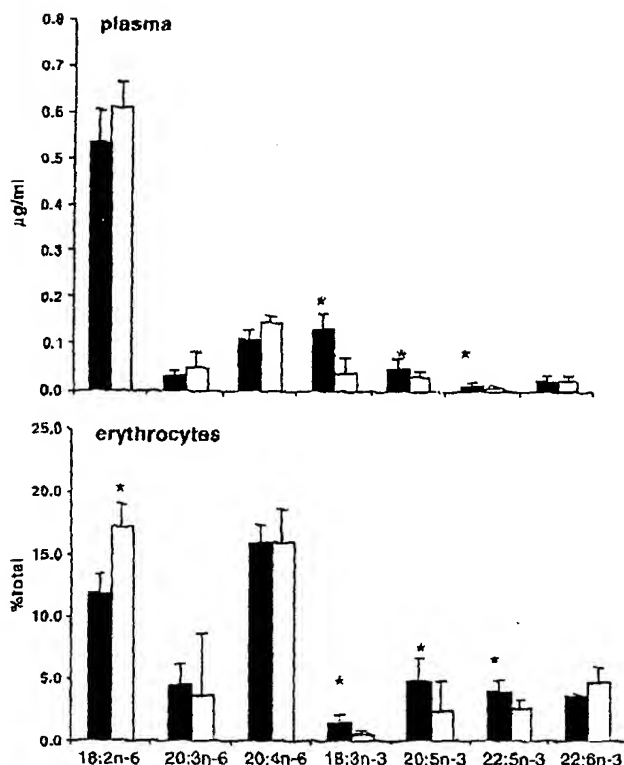


Fig. 3. Fatty acid composition of the sampled plasma pool and erythrocyte membrane during the  $^{13}\text{C}$  tracer study. Black bars, FXO diet ( $n = 6$ ); white bars, SO diet ( $n = 5$ ). Values are means  $\pm$  SD. \*  $P < 0.05$ .

fluences on pool sizes of LA and ALA, were low and of similar magnitude overall for AA and EPA (0.18% and 0.26%; Table 2). LA  $\rightarrow$  DGLA and AA formation was significantly lower on the FXO diet in each case, with ALA  $\rightarrow$  EPA and DPA formation on average higher on the FXO diet, although the differences were not significant. Conversion of tracers to DHA was much less. Thus, whereas all six SO subjects demonstrated  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichment in DHA by day 7, only three of six FXO subjects were enriched by day 7, with one subject enriched at 1 and 3 days only and two subjects showing no enrichment in either of duplicate measurements at any time.

The time course of the  $^{13}\text{C}$  concentration values in LA, ALA, and LCPs (micrograms per milliliter of plasma) is shown in Fig. 4 as measured values for LA and ALA and the adjusted values for the LCPs. Labeling was declining

for both LA and ALA after 24 h. However, tracer was still increasing in conversion products at 24 h, peaking at 48 h for DGLA, after this for AA, by 48 h for EPA, at 72 h for DPA, and some time after this for DHA; the level of labeling of DHA was too low to identify its time course with any certainty. As reported in all previous studies, there was considerable variability between subjects in the extent of  $^{13}\text{C}$  labeling.

A comparison of the AUC values adjusted for dietary influences on pool sizes of LA and ALA (Table 3) showed that LCP formation from LA was reduced by the FXO diet, with lower DGLA ( $P < 0.05$ ) and AA  $^{13}\text{C}$  AUC values ( $P < 0.01$ ), approximately half the values observed on the SO diet. As might be expected, because the tracer appearing in AA was similar to or slightly greater than that in DGLA, fractional conversion of DGLA  $\rightarrow$  AA was close to

TABLE 2. Overall tracer conversion to LCPs

Diet	DGLA	AA	EPA	DPA	DHA
FXO ( $n = 6$ )	$0.20 \pm 0.06$	$0.12 \pm 0.05$	$0.29 \pm 0.19$	$0.05 \pm 0.03$	$<0.01 \pm 0.01$
SO ( $n = 5$ )	$0.29 \pm 0.05$	$0.26 \pm 0.07$	$0.19 \pm 0.06$	$0.02 \pm 0.01$	$<0.01 \pm 0.00$
Both diets ( $n = 11$ )	$0.23 \pm 0.07$	$0.18 \pm 0.09$	$0.26 \pm 0.15$	$0.04 \pm 0.02$	$<0.01 \pm 0.01$
<i>P</i>	$<0.05$	$<0.05$	NS	NS	NS

AA, arachidonic acid; DGLA, dihomog- $\gamma$ -linolenic acid; DHA, docosahexaenoic acid; DPA, docosapentaenoic acid; EPA, eicosapentaenoic acid; LCP, very long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid. Values are means  $\pm$  SD. Overall conversion is indicated as maximum plasma  $^{13}\text{C}$  content as a percentage of dose of either [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]linoleic acid (LA) or [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ] $\alpha$ -linolenic acid (ALA). Values are adjusted for variable precursor enrichments (see text).

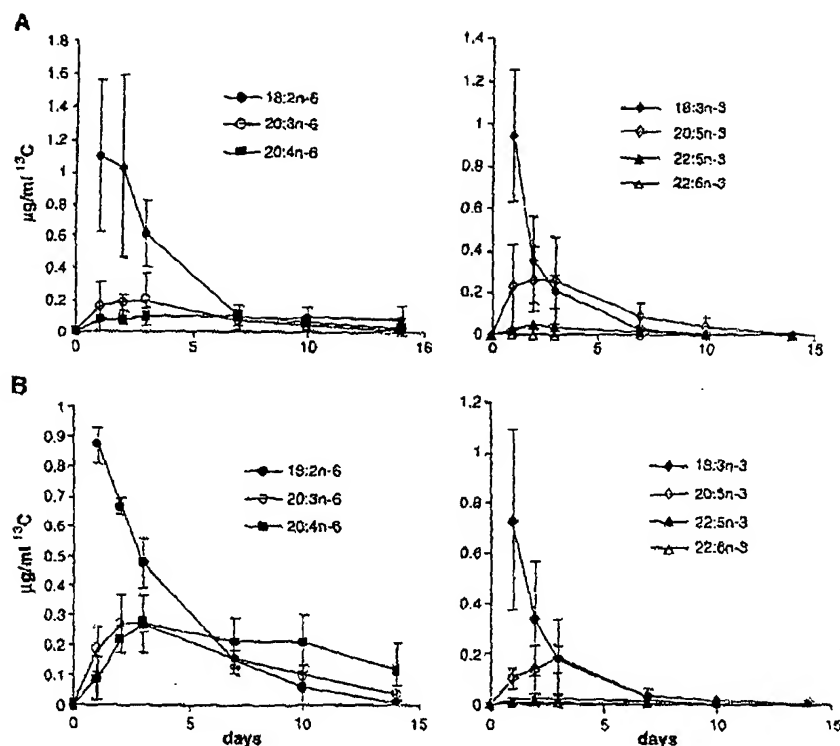


Fig. 4. Time course of  $^{13}\text{C}$  labeling of n-3 and n-6 long-chain PUFAs in the plasma total lipid fraction. Values shown are  $^{13}\text{C}$  concentrations as measured for ALA and LA and adjusted values for all LCPs, where the adjustment takes into account variation in precursor pool sizes and enrichments (see text). A: FXO diet ( $n = 6$ ). B: SO diet ( $n = 5$ ). Values are means  $\pm$  SD.

unity on each diet ( $0.87 \pm 0.30$  and  $1.31 \pm 0.48$  in the SO and FXO diets, respectively). EPA formation was on average increased with the FXO diet, although not significantly so, because of the wide variation between the FXO subjects (attributable to one subject on the FXO diet exhibiting much less ALA conversion than the other subjects).

Relative n-6:n-3 LCP formation, as judged by the ratio of AA/EPA formation, was only approximately one-third of the value on the FXO diet compared with the SO diet ( $P < 0.05$ ). Post-EPA conversion was  $\sim 20\%$  for EPA  $\rightarrow$  DPA, 20–40% for DPA  $\rightarrow$  DHA, and 7–11% for EPA  $\rightarrow$  DHA,

with no obvious dietary influences, although the level of enrichment in DHA was low.

Correlation analysis between tracer in LCPs and fatty acid concentrations in the sampled plasma pool (Table 4) showed that in general LCP formation of both n-6 and n-3 series reflected precursor concentrations with inverse correlations (in many cases) with fatty acids of the alternative series. There was little evidence of product inhibition. Thus, ALA concentrations correlated directly with  $^{13}\text{C}$  EPA formation ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and inversely with  $^{13}\text{C}$  DGLA and  $^{13}\text{C}$  AA formation ( $r = -0.61$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), whereas LA concentration correlated directly with  $^{13}\text{C}$

TABLE 3. Adjusted isotopic enrichment ( $\text{AUC}_{14d}$ ) of long-chain conversion products

Diet	$\text{AUC}_{14d}$ Value					
	DGLA	AA	EPA	DPA	DHA	AA/EPA
			$\mu\text{g/ml/h}$			ratio
FXO ( $n = 6$ )	$81.3 \pm 14.9$	$24.5 \pm 7.2$	$38.7 \pm 28.6$	$5.7 \pm 2.6$	$1.0 \pm 0.9$	$1.16 \pm 1.20$
SO ( $n = 5$ )	$50.2 \pm 3.8$	$64.4 \pm 19.8$	$21.4 \pm 4.2$	$3.9 \pm 1.0$	$1.4 \pm 0.2$	$2.94 \pm 1.13$
Both diets ( $n = 11$ )	$38.9 \pm 17.5$	$40.3 \pm 26.4$	$31.8 \pm 23.8$	$5.0 \pm 2.6$	$1.2 \pm 0.8$	$1.9 \pm 1.2$
P	$<0.05$	$<0.05$	NS	NS	NS	$<0.05$

$\text{AUC}_{14d}$ , area under the curve for the 14-day time course. Values are means  $\pm$  SD. Values are adjusted for variable precursor enrichments (see text).

TABLE 4. Correlations between LA, ALA, and LCP concentrations and LCP conversion ( $^{13}\text{C}$  AUC values)

$^{13}\text{C}$ AUC Values $\mu\text{g/ml/h}$	Concentrations in Plasma Lipids						
	LA	DGLA	AA	ALA	EPA	DPA	DHA
				$\text{mg/ml}$			
$^{13}\text{C}$ DGLA	0.77 $P < 0.01$	0.57 $P < 0.05$	0.56 $P < 0.05$	-0.34 NS	-0.37 NS	-0.18 NS	-0.63 NS
$^{13}\text{C}$ AA	0.51 $P < 0.1$	0.80 $P < 0.01$	0.83 $P < 0.01$	-0.61 $P < 0.05$	-0.32 NS	-0.47 NS	-0.21 NS
$^{13}\text{C}$ EPA	0.02 NS	-0.35 NS	0.09 NS	0.61 $P < 0.05$	0.26 NS	0.21 NS	-0.28 NS
$^{13}\text{C}$ DPA	-0.54 $P < 0.1$	0.38 NS	-0.08 NS	-0.13 NS	0.83 $P < 0.01$	0.68 $P < 0.05$	0.80 $P < 0.01$
$^{13}\text{C}$ DHA	0.11 NS	-0.18 NS	-0.09 NS	0.05 NS	0.12 NS	-0.14 NS	-0.05 NS

Pearson correlation coefficients and their significance values are shown.

DGLA formation ( $r = 0.77$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). LA concentration also correlated weakly with  $^{13}\text{C}$  AA formation ( $r = 0.51$ ,  $P < 0.1$ ) and inversely with  $^{13}\text{C}$  DPA formation ( $r = 0.54$ ,  $P < 0.1$ ). Similarly EPA concentration was correlated with  $^{13}\text{C}$  DPA formation ( $r = 0.83$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), with a weak inverse correlation with LA concentration ( $r = -0.5$ ,  $P < 0.1$ ), whereas DGLA concentration was correlated with  $^{13}\text{C}$  AA formation ( $r = 0.80$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ).  $^{13}\text{C}$  DHA formation was unrelated to the concentration of any fatty acid.

#### DISCUSSION

Our hypothesis in the work described here was that a marked change in the dietary LA/ALA ratio would change the relative rates of formation of n-6:n-3 LCPs from their precursor fatty acids as measured by both  $^{13}\text{C}$  tracer studies and through compositional changes in erythrocyte fatty acid profiles.

The three dietary groups were well matched at baseline with respect to erythrocyte fatty acid profiles, with initial levels of EPA and DHA similar to those in previous studies (40), although the high levels of LA (14%) and AA (15%) suggest a high background intake of LA. The increased concentrations of ALA, EPA, and DPA on the FXO diet were at the expense of palmitic and oleic acids, but with only modest decreases in LA and no changes in AA at any time. Indeed, there was no evidence of any inverse relationship between EPA and AA concentrations in either the FXO group ( $r^2 = 0.02$ ) or the SOF group ( $r^2 = 0.07$ ), suggesting that EPA did not replace AA. Others have noted that reductions in dietary intakes of LA are generally ineffective at changing concentrations of LA (41) or AA in relatively short time studies (42, 43). Because  $^{13}\text{C}$  LA conversion to AA did reflect relative concentrations of LA and ALA, we must assume that substantial LA, and possibly AA, storage in adipose tissue (44, 45) resulted in an additional supply of LA and AA independent of acute dietary intake (42, 46). A 12 month intervention providing 2.5% dietary energy as ALA in a high-LA diet (47) did attenuate the increase in AA in serum cholesterol esters compared with a similar LA intake with less ALA, suggesting that increased ALA can modify LA-to-LCP conversion.

Our finding of a substantial increase in EPA but no change in DHA in membrane phospholipids is consistent with most (11, 14, 48, 49) but not all (50, 51) previous reports of ALA supplementation in adults. The highest levels of enrichment of EPA are usually achieved at the lower intakes of FXO (48), suggesting that high levels of ALA inhibit its conversion to EPA. Indeed, the inverse relationship between dietary ALA and the DHA content of membrane phospholipids (42) suggests that increased ALA and/or EPA may displace DHA. In a recent 6 month study with 9.5 g of ALA per day, although EPA increased in peripheral blood mononuclear cells, DHA concentration decreased (49). The ALA/LA ratio rather than the absolute amount of ALA has been suggested to regulate the conversion to EPA (52), consistent with the report that doubling the intake of ALA at a constant dietary ALA/LA value had no additional influence on platelet EPA content (43).

The  $^{13}\text{C}$  results show that LCP formation from both dietary LA or ALA does vary with its relative supply and inversely in many cases with concentrations of fatty acids of the alternative series. This is in accord with conventional thinking from in vitro studies that LA and ALA compete for  $\Delta 6$ -desaturation, the first step in the biosynthesis of long-chain PUFAs (53, 54). It is important because the apparent resistance of AA concentrations to dietary change has led some authors to question conventional ideas about the regulation of LCP formation (55). Thus, formation of both  $^{13}\text{C}$  DGLA and  $^{13}\text{C}$  AA [i.e.,  $^{13}\text{C}$  (mg/ml) AUC<sub>144</sub>] varied directly with plasma LA concentration and inversely with ALA concentration, whereas  $^{13}\text{C}$  EPA formation varied directly with ALA concentration. This meant that the marked reduction in the n-6:n-3 ratio by the FXO diet resulted in a halving of  $^{13}\text{C}$  LA conversion to  $^{13}\text{C}$  AA and a doubling in  $^{13}\text{C}$  ALA conversion to  $^{13}\text{C}$  EPA compared with the high n-6:n-3 ratio SO diet. The same pattern of dietary effects was indicated by the comparisons of absolute rates of LCP formation from peak plasma concentrations of  $^{13}\text{C}$  AA and  $^{13}\text{C}$  EPA.

However, although our findings for the reduction in n-6 LCP formation in response to the decreased dietary n-6:n-3 ratio are robust, the increases in n-3 LCP formation were less so. Significant changes were limited to the correla-



tion between ALA concentration and [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]EPA formation. These findings need to be considered in the context of the low power of the study to detect minor dietary influences because of the high cost of U- $^{13}\text{C}$  tracers, low levels of enrichment, and marked between-subject variability in tracer handling, as observed in all such studies reported to date (11, 14, 22, 23). Tracer studies of fatty acid metabolism *in vivo* represent a particularly difficult problem given the lack of access to the tissue compartments where LCP formation takes place and an inability to measure exit rates of individual LCPs in the pathway as oxidation/carbon recycling or tissue deposition. Few studies have attempted more than relatively crude estimates of isotope transfer from tracer into the various tracee pools (22, 23), and it is recognized that AUC values will overestimate true conversion rates and provide only approximate relative rates of transfer (39). The two measures of conversion calculated here, peak plasma concentration and AUC, were proportional and highly correlated ( $r^2 = 0.79$ ) but involved different assumptions and gave slightly different comparative results (Tables 3, 4). Thus, the slower decay of enrichment in the n-6 series fatty acids reflecting the larger pool sizes meant that the ratio of  $^{13}\text{C}$  AUC/peak concentration was significantly higher for this series than for the n-3 series.

Our adjustment for variation in tracee pool sizes and consequent  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichments between diets and between fatty acid series attempts to deal with a serious issue recognized in some (21) but not other studies (18, 29). In a tracer study of n-3 and n-6 LCP formation in adults, Salem et al. (21) interpreted the 4-fold greater isotopic enrichment in EPA compared with AA as reflecting the greater initial enrichment of ALA compared with LA, with true relative rates of EPA synthesis likely to be lower than AA rates. Others (29) interpret a 5-fold greater  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichment in ALA and its LCPs after a decline in dietary ALA as indicating that dietary ALA reduces ALA long-chain conversion, without commenting on the between-diet tracer dilution problem. Indeed, to our knowledge, an upregulation of ALA long-chain conversion by increased dietary ALA or a reduced LA/ALA ratio has not been demonstrated even when increased concentrations of LCPs occurred; this reflects, in part, lack of adjustment for the lower  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichment in ALA after a high-ALA diet (29). Others report a 5- to 10-fold higher conversion rate of ALA compared with LA as a real, between-series difference and not an artifact attributable to differential initial isotope dilution, arguing that this would not influence the weight or concentration of trace-labeled metabolites (18), an assertion that is difficult to support. Our  $^{13}\text{C}$  adjustment algorithm, normalizing for assumed precursor enrichments, assumes that the adjustment was not markedly influenced by the lack of time points before 24 h in the AUC  $^{13}\text{C}$  APE values. In fact, lack of early time points at peak labeling for LA and ALA  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichments (<24 h), with a consequent underestimation of enrichment values over time, would have underestimated the errors. This is because the ALA enrichment AUC would have been more underestimated than that of LA and more underesti-

mated on the low-ALA diet compared with the high-ALA diet. In turn, this means that we underestimated both the upward adjustment of n-6 compared with n-3 LCPs and n-3 LCPs on the high-ALA diet compared with the low-ALA diet. This strengthens rather than weakens the findings reported here. Clearly, there is an urgent need to develop more precise and standardized analytical models for tracer studies of fatty acid metabolism.

The low long-chain conversion of LA reported here is consistent with results from other human studies (18, 39, 56, 57) and with animal data (51, 58, 59) and reflects the low initial conversion of [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]LA to [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]DGLA. Similarly, previous [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]ALA studies have shown oxidation to be its major fate (17), with conversion to EPA varying from ~8% (18, 25) to much lower values (0.2%; 22, 23), consistent with our results. With the  $\Delta 6$ -desaturase rate limiting LCP formation, once formed, [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]DGLA is converted almost quantitatively to [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]AA and 20–30% of EPA is converted to DPA, as reported by others (25–27, 29). Reports of the conversion of ALA to DHA range from 4% (18) to no significant DHA synthesis (25) or <0.05% (27). Our finding of an overall conversion of <0.01% of the administered [ $^{13}\text{C}$ ]ALA tracer to DHA is consistent with the latter reports.

If the  $\Delta 6$ -desaturase is the rate-limiting step in n-3 and n-6 LCP formation, the higher tissue concentrations of LA compared with ALA might be expected to result in higher rates of LA conversion compared with ALA, even taking into account the 1.5- to 3.0-fold higher  $\Delta 6$ -desaturase conversion rates for ALA compared with LA indicated by animal studies (60, 61). However, product inhibition may be an important regulator of C18 conversion to LCPs *in vivo*. Without such a mechanism, the high intake of LA in many human diets would result in the accumulation of high levels of n-6 LCPs in tissue lipid stores. Tang et al. (62) have reported that product inhibition occurs via suppression of the human  $\Delta 6$ -desaturase enzyme by LCPs mediated through its activation by peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors. It must be assumed that product inhibition by AA will affect LCP conversion of both LA and ALA.

In conclusion, when variation in  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichment attributable to variable tracee pool sizes is taken into account, reducing the dietary LA/ALA ratio downregulates LA conversion to AA and most likely upregulates ALA conversion to EPA. This suggests that the relative concentrations of the n-6 and n-3 LCP eicosanoid precursors do reflect relative dietary intakes of LA and ALA, but the relatively high background ratio of dietary n-6:n-3 tends to minimize changes in membrane AA in short-term studies. Even the Canadian Inuit, with very high intakes of n-3 LCPs, have an AA/EPA ratio of 2 (63). The regulation of DHA levels in tissues remains an enigma. The fact that DHA can be formed from ALA, albeit at a very low rate, but cannot be increased by increased dietary ALA suggests that DHA concentrations, at least in circulating phospholipid pools, are regulated to satisfy a relatively low metabolic demand that can be satisfied by the relatively low levels observed in vegans with no dietary DHA intake and with erythrocyte DHA levels lower than EPA (64). From

this perspective, it could be argued that any cardioprotection associated with increased dietary DHA intake and increased tissue levels represents a pharmacological response to an increased risk associated with an imbalanced n:6:n3 ratio. ■

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